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Which Wine Container Is Better — Bottle or Box?

Gemma Alexander February 22, 2019



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Today there are many wines that are healthy for you and for the planet, with biodynamic, USDA organic, and Napa Green certification. But how your wine gets to your glass might be as important as what you pour. Which is the better wine delivery method: in a bottle or in a box?

A Question of Class

Even wine bottles with screw caps don't face the level of prejudice that boxed wine does. Many people assume that all boxed wines are just a step above fortified wines. It is true that wine in a box is cheaper than wine in a bottle — in large part because bottling wine is more expensive than boxing it. Cost-cutting vintners and bargain-hunting consumers may have been the early adopters of boxed wines, but the number and variety of quality wines in boxes is growing. There is also growing evidence that boxing wine is more eco-friendly than bottling it.

Bottled Wine

In a world swimming in plastic waste, glass would seem to be a sustainable packaging choice. Glass bottles have been around for centuries, and glass is easily recycled. Unfortunately, only about a third of wine bottles actually get recycled — the rest end up in the garbage. Some wine makers are using

recycled glass in their bottles. Gallo uses 30 percent of the recycled glass in California to make more than half of their wine bottles.

Industrywide, however, up to half of a wine bottle's carbon footprint come from the glass bottle itself. The biggest environmental problem with glass wine bottles is shipping. Glass is heavy and cannot be packed as tightly as boxes. A standard 750-milliliter bottle of wine traveling from a vineyard in California to a store in New York generates about 5.2 pounds of carbon-dioxide.

Box Wine

Shipping a three-liter box of wine generates about half the emissions per 750 milliliters. Cardboard is no less recyclable than glass and, in fact, is recycled about twice as often. One downside to cardboard wine boxes is the plastic liner and spigot. Most analyses ignore the bag in the box and look only at the outer cardboard container. One life cycle analysis found that even with the sustainability impacts of unrecyclable packaging components, bag-in-a-box wines were more sustainable than glass bottles.

Better Choices

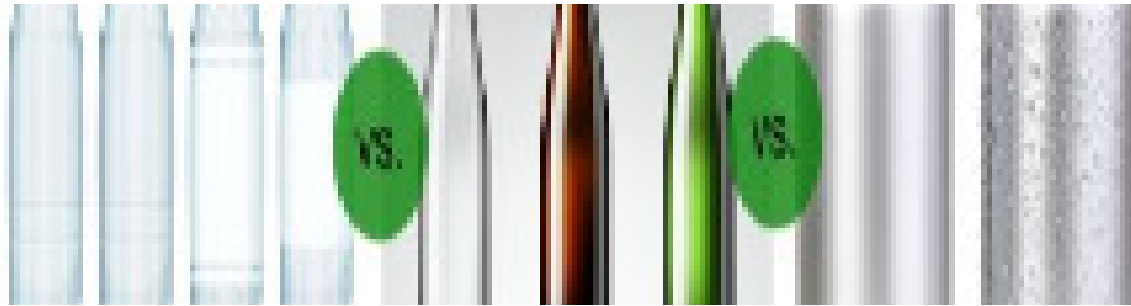
The environmental world is full of false choices — paper or plastic, conscious consumerism versus activism — and bottle or box may be yet another example. In France, locals buy “vin en vrac” or bulk wine, directly from the winery and carry it home in their own reusable containers. Bunker Hill Vineyard and Winery in Florida uses sterilized second-hand wine bottles.

And the newest trend in (potentially) greener wine packaging? Aluminum cans. Virgin aluminum has an even higher carbon footprint than glass. But aluminum cans are recycled at higher rates than glass bottles and usually contain more recycled material. Like boxes, cans are lighter and easier to ship, which tips the balance in favor of aluminum cans over glass bottles.

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Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).